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## **R280 million injection to bring relief to missing middle students at public universities**

Universities South Africa (USAf) has secured a total of R280 million from the Education, Training and Development Practices Sector Education and Training Authority (ETDP SETA) as a grant to fund bursaries of students in the public higher education sector for the 2020 academic year. The target students belong in the missing-middle category. These are students whose annual family income falls in the R350 001 to R600 000 bracket, which places them above the qualifying threshold of the National Student Financial Aid Scheme and often precludes this category of students from qualifying for study loans from commercial banks. In numbers, missing-middle students represent between 200,000 and 250,000, a figure accounting for between 16.6% and 20% of the total current student population (1,2m) at the 26 public universities.

The award of R200 million (71.4%) will go into bursaries of at least 7000 students enrolled for undergraduate study. The remaining R80 million (28.6%) has been allocated towards bursaries of at least 2500 students pursuing post-graduate studies. All the 9500 beneficiaries, selected by financial aid offices across the public university system, are needy and academically deserving individuals who have been proven to not qualify for other funding options. USAf and ETDP-SETA are currently verifying the selection submissions received from universities.

"We are immensely grateful to the ETDP-SETA for this cash injection", Prof Ahmed Bawa, Chief Executive Officer at Universities SA, says. "While this amount will reach about 38% of the target population, a large majority remains left out in the cold." That is why USAf continues to negotiate with private sector organisations to join it in partnerships that seek to "drive a fundamental transformation of our society by increasing access to higher education, of students from the economically struggling class. It is also critical to retain those students in the system for the duration of their study, and that they succeed and complete their studies in record time," Professor Bawa states.

He adds that higher education was long proven to be an important lever for lifting people out of poverty. Higher education enhances graduates' chances at employment or entrepreneurship, which, together, offer relatively higher and more sustainable rewards in comparison to the opportunities available to individuals limited to the basic schooling qualification.

In turn, the Chief Executive Officer of the ETDP SETA, Mrs Nombulelo Sesi Nxesi, has expressed her delight in the partnership with USAf. She says she is confident that USAf's involvement in these bursary allocations helps to eliminate possible duplications of bursary disbursements towards students in need. Mrs Nxesi has also highlighted the need for more of such interventions and partnerships, which, in her view, can only guarantee positive outcomes. "It is only through education that the lives of our people can be improved for the better," Mrs Nxesi concludes.

USAf's ongoing fundraising is being driven from the Directorate: Operations and Sector support, headed by Dr Linda Meyer, and the Directorate: Finance and Administrative Support, headed by Mr Emert Nkhatu. USAf is a representative association of all 26 public universities, whose aims include supporting South Africa's universities to effectively perform their core functions of teaching and

learning; research and community engagement; thus enabling them to contribute to national development.

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